

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

A DRAWN GAME.

BY BASIL.

AUTHOR OF "LOVE THE DEBT," ETC.

CHAPTER XLVI. ARCHIE ALSO SURPASSES HIMSELF.

AFTER lunch Mrs. Tuck proposed as a distraction for herself and Ida a walk into the heart of the City. Mrs. Tuck was not given to walking, but she wished to see the shops and their prices. "We both want rousing a bit, my dear, and the bustle will do us good."

But the effect upon Ida of the ceaseless roar and roll of the great billows of life as they surged around her, deaf and cruel as the sea, was rather depressing than exhilarating. "The greater the city the deeper the solitude" is a proverb of many countries; for, of course, loneliness in a crowd is like the thirst of Tantalus. A vast river flowing past parched lips, which may not drink from it, is not a mockery merely, but also an aggravation of the torment of thirst.

Thus Ida was oppressed and almost appalled by the sepulchral loneliness of the vast crowd which swept past her in Fleet Street with sad, set faces. At last she came upon something that had for her the face of a friend. Her aunt had stopped to look at some large photographs in a window, and Ida's eyes wandered listlessly over them till she came to one which aroused and arrested her attention. It was a large photograph of that painting which had fascinated her in the Wolstenholme Exhibition—Sir Richard Steele's First Sorrow. It was associated now with the two great troubles of her life—her mother's death and her ill-starred love.

"I should like to get that," she said with sudden interest, to Mrs. Tuck's surprise.

"Which, dear? That coffin!" horrified by so morbid a taste.

"It's an old favourite of mine."

Mrs. Tuck wondered where and when she had seen it, but never thought of the exhibition and Archie. However, the girl must be humoured. Accordingly they entered the shop, but had to wait a minute before they could be attended to. The shopman was looking out a photograph for a gentleman, which he soon found and brought.

"This is it, sir. The one in the window is slightly soiled." It was the very photograph—Sir Richard Steele's First Sorrow.

"I should like it framed," he said, and Ida's heart seemed to stop, and the shop to whirl round.

She grasped Mrs. Tuck's arm, and turned to quit the shop. The shopman, thinking they were going in despair of being attended to, said:

"Excuse me, sir, one moment. What is it, madam?"

Archie turned, and stood face to face with them. He grew suddenly white, but was so far from looking conscious, guilty, and confused, that he faced them, scornful and defiant.

"I shall be back presently," he said to the shopman, as he raised his hat to the two ladies and quitted the shop.

His heart was hot within him, for, of course, Ida's insult in sending back his letter unopened seemed to him outrageous beyond all possibility of explanation or extenuation. And that she should now have surprised him ordering this photograph, plainly for its association with her, was bitterly mortifying to his pride. Hence the withering scorn of his glance at Ida. Against the evidence of that glance, the evidence even of her own eyes, even of his own writing, seemed at the moment weak to Ida. It

was absolutely and utterly impossible that the most consummate hypocrite in the world, if suddenly surprised as Archie was, could look outraged innocence to such perfection. Therefore, as Archie haughtily passed her to quit the shop, and she sank into a chair dizzy and faint, she felt wretchedly certain that she had wronged him past redemption.

Mrs. Tuck, seeing the state in which she was, bought the photograph for her, gave the address to which it was to be sent, and then turned to quit the shop with her. Ida rose and accompanied her mechanically for a few steps past the door, and then stopped suddenly to say:

"He never wrote it."

"But you saw yourself it was his writing, Ida," a little impatiently.

"There's some mistake. He can explain. I must see him."

"To be again imposed upon. You're so guileless, any one could impose on you."

"Then you will see him, Mrs. Tuck?" imploringly.

"What's the use? You will still believe in him, no matter what I think," with a suspicion of scorn for the girl's infatuation in her tone.

"No; if he cannot clear himself to you I shall never see him or speak of him again," with an earnestness that came of her certainty of his clearing himself.

Ida was so passionately eager, that there was nothing for it but to give way to her; and, after all, as there was no possibility of his explaining the letter away, no harm, but good rather, could come of the interview suggested. Ida would be satisfied then, and till then would disbelieve, or doubt, his duplicity. Therefore, after a moment's reflection, Mrs. Tuck said:

"Very well, dear, I shall ask him to call upon me this evening, though I doubt if he will. If you will walk slowly on I will return to the shop and wait for him there." Then seeing Ida look ill, she said: "You had better take a cab, dear."

And Ida, feeling her limbs tremble under her, and her head still dizzy, was fain to get into a passing hansom, and be driven back to the hotel.

Mrs. Tuck did what she could by her manner to bring about the fulfilment of her prophecy, that Archie would decline the interview, and she very nearly succeeded. She had to wait some minutes in the shop before Archie returned, and then she addressed him somewhat in the tone and style of a duellist offering a challenge.

"I waited to see you for a moment. Could you give me the favour of an interview this evening? We are staying at the Charing Cross Hotel."

Archie was about, with equal hauteur, to decline the honour on the plea of another engagement, when his eagerness to get at some explanation of Ida's conduct overcame his pride. He bowed coldly, and curtly asked:

"At what hour?"

"Six, if it will suit you."

He bowed again, and at once turned away to arrange with the shopman about the framing of the photograph.

Mrs. Tuck went uneasy away. Certainly his manner was that of a man conscious only of disgraceful ill-usage. What, if he really could, in some inconceivable way, explain the letter? Mrs. Tuck was now sorry that she had arranged for the interview. Suppose he cleared himself at this, the most inopportune moment possible—the moment of Dick's dismissal? Nothing then could prevent the reconciliation of the cousins—or their marriage! For Ida was just the kind of girl to think his very illegitimacy a reason for indemnifying him with her hand for the loss of his name and fortune. As for his protesting that it must separate him for ever, not from her only, but from England, it was a piece of clap-trap, which his lingering on at Heatherley, long after he was well enough to emigrate, itself contradicted.

Certainly, then, it was a rash thing to invite him to clear himself. However, he must clear himself to her satisfaction—very thoroughly indeed, that is—and she must keep him to the one point on which her case seemed secure. Did he, or did he not, write that letter? She must not allow him to excuse, explain, or palliate his writing it, as he might offer a hundred ingenious reasons of pity or of generosity for the indiscretion; no, she must not let him wander a hair's-breadth from the one point which seemed undisputable—the writing of the letter. If he admitted it, she would at once dismiss him and report the admission to Ida, as an admission (which it was virtually) of the resumption of his disgraceful relations with that woman. Most of us in a thousand things are as really, if not as consciously, insincere as Mrs. Tuck was in this matter. We push enquiry to a point where we think ourselves safe, but will not push it past that point, because, we say, all beyond is certain, because we feel all beyond is uncertain.

Mrs. Tuck, having planned the battle according to these Napoleonic tactics of flinging her whole force on the weak point of the foe, felt more reassured about the interview. She arrived in a cab at the hotel soon after Ida, and informed her that her cousin had assented to the interview after a good deal of hesitation. Unfortunately the infatuated Ida put the opposite construction on this hesitation to that which Mrs. Tuck meant to suggest—attributing it to Archie's sense, not of guilt, but of injury. It was not Mrs. Tuck's fault, however, if Ida took a hopeful view of the result of the meeting, for Mrs. Tuck spent a good part of an hour in putting the case against Archie as clearly as she possibly could. It was a kindness to prepare the girl for the worst.

Archie arrived punctually at six, and was received by Mrs. Tuck with a freezing reserve which did no little violence to her sense of hospitality. She was forced above all things to avoid a manner which might invite confidence.

"I have put you to the trouble to call, in order to give and to ask an explanation on behalf of Miss Luard." It will be remarked that Mrs. Tuck avoided calling Archie by any name, for she wouldn't call him "Mr. Guard," and couldn't bring herself to call him "Mr. Chown."

Archie simply bowed in answer to this preface.

"Miss Luard sent back a letter of yours unopened, and she wishes me to offer this explanation of the discourtesy," handing Archie his letter to Anastasia. "She now thinks the letter may possibly be a forgery, and she wishes me to ask you but one question, 'Is it your writing?'"

Archie looked at the letter, read it, and answered:

"Yes, I wrote it."

"Thank you; that is all we wished to know."

"But I wrote it——" began Archie, only to be at once interrupted by Mrs. Tuck, who feared all explanation or extenuation, though, of course, she had not the least idea of the one Archie was about to offer.

"Pray do not trouble to enter into details. The letter speaks for itself. We have no wish to pry into your private affairs."

"So I perceive!" cried Archie in bitter scorn and sarcasm, glancing significantly at the letter, which he then tossed on the table, as he rose, bowed, and quitted the room.

He was wild and bewildered, and even

confounded with anger, surprise, and scorn. This was worse than his worst imagination. That Ida should stoop to the baseness of reading a letter not meant for her eye! It was inconceivable! Yet she avowed it shamelessly through this Mrs. Tuck! Nor was this the sole letter of his she had read; for, of course, Anastasia had sent her either the whole packet or a selection of the most damaging. Thus Archie inferred naturally, and indeed inevitably. He had no more suspicion that the letter was supposed to have been written yesterday, than Mrs. Tuck had of its having been written a year and a half since.

Therefore they parted with pretty much the same impression of each other's cynical shamelessness; for Archie confessed to having written the letter with as much composure as Mrs. Tuck confessed to having read it.

On Archie's abrupt departure Mrs. Tuck returned triumphant to Ida. Ida read her doom in her face.

"He wrote it!" she cried, as Mrs. Tuck entered her room.

"Wrote it? He glories in it. Anything more defiant or indecent than his manner in admitting it, I never saw."

Then Mrs. Tuck proceeded to speak of his avowal of the letter as an avowal of his engagement to Anastasia, leading Ida to understand—what was to herself a certain inference—that he had gloried explicitly in his relapse into the toils of that siren.

Such baseness, duplicity, effrontery in any man was hardly conceivable by Ida, but in Archie——! Could it be that his reason had given way? The fever, the excitement of the fire, and the successive shocks of one trouble upon another, were enough to overthrow any man's reason. At least this was a more probable explanation of his conduct than that the revival of Anastasia's influence should make him behave so strangely, so incomprehensibly.

"He's not himself!" she exclaimed at last, out of patience with Mrs. Tuck's long and bitter tirade against Archie.

Then Mrs. Tuck began almost to think that Ida's brain was getting unsettled. No rational creature could continue to believe in such a man after his own defiant avowal of his worthlessness. She, therefore, in her turn, was a little out of patience with Ida.

"I don't know who he is, and he hardly knows himself, I dare say," pointing this allusion to his illegitimacy with a sneer. "But I know you're well rid of him, and so is the country."

"Did he say he was going soon?" wistfully. Then Mrs. Tuck lost all patience with this continued interest in the scandalous cousin.

"I didn't ask him, Ida; for I couldn't have believed that you would ask me."

Having administered this snub with great severity, and asperity even, of voice and manner, Mrs. Tuck still further emphasised it by quitting the room.

FIVE ITALIAN STORIES.

THE BISHOP'S DINNER.

SINCE the reign of the Emperor Frederick the Second, few Italian lords have been so rich or so powerful as one known in his country as the Marquis de la Scala. He was one of the few men who are all through life the favourites of fortune, yet who know how to make good use of their honour and of their wealth. This nobleman was very generous in entertaining his friends and acquaintances, and one day a superb fête was announced as to be given by him shortly at his mansion in Verona. Great preparations were set on foot, and all tongues busied themselves in describing the grandeur of the coming banquet. Suddenly La Scala changed his mind for some unexplained reason, saying the fête would not take place at all. Many strangers had come to the town in readiness, and as the Marquis did not wish these to go away under the impression that he was mean, he loaded each one with presents, which in value would far more than make up to them for the expense of their journeys.

He forgot one person only, a man named Bergamino, and it was rumoured that this omission on the part of the nobleman had been voluntary; he did not know Bergamino, and therefore thought it needless to take the least trouble to please him.

Now Bergamino had undertaken this journey to Verona solely to assure himself if all the widely-spread reports of La Scala's great munificence were true. It was thus a most vexatious disappointment, the more so as he had been at great expense in lodging himself, his servants, and his horses, at the inn. Nevertheless, he remained where he was until he had spent all the money he had brought with him, and that being exhausted, he began to pay for his accommodation by selling his clothes. Three very rich dresses were in his trunks, for he had expected to need them when

he took part in the gay doings at the house of the Marquis. One of these had to be used to settle for what he owed, and it was not long ere the second was turned to similar account. The third would doubtless have followed, but that just at the time Bergamino had resolved on another way of getting out of his difficulty. Presenting himself to the Signor la Scala, when that gentleman was at dinner, he assumed a very sorrowful and abstracted air.

"What ails you?" cried the nobleman; "you seem unhappy. May I be allowed to hear the cause of your trouble?"

Bergamino had already decided what he should say, so he at once opened his lips.

"You doubtless have heard, my lord," said he, "of a celebrated grammarian named Primasso, who made the most excellent verses of any poet of his time. His talent for improvising on any subject, combined with his other rare abilities, secured him many friends; in fact, his praise was spread both far and near. The desire to increase the number of his acquaintances led Primasso to undertake a journey to Paris, but he appeared there in a humble guise, for his knowledge had not made him prosperous—great people rarely recompense real merit!

"Arrived in the city, Primasso heard much concerning the Bishop of Cluny, who, after the Pope, was said to possess more wealth than any other prelate of the Church. Wondrous were the accounts of his magnificence, of the splendour of his table, and especially of the manner in which all were regaled who chose to visit him at the hour of dinner. Curious to see a rich man who was also generous, Primasso resolved to pay a visit to the good Bishop.

"It appeared that, just then, the prelate was residing in one of his country mansions not many miles away from the city; therefore, Primasso calculated that, by starting early, he should be able to get there in good time for dinner.

"Having studied the road, he made his arrangements for starting; but for fear lest he might lose his way and be delayed, he had the prudence to provide himself with three rolls, which would secure him against hunger. However, he found the distance easier to accomplish than he had expected, so he was at the Bishop's house somewhat in advance of the dinner-hour. Being at once admitted, he had time to look around him and to observe the grand preparations which were making. Pre-

sently, the governor of the household called out that dinner would shortly be served, and that the guests must place themselves at table. By chance, Primasso was seated exactly facing the door through which the prelate would presently pass to the banquet, and it was the custom that even the first course should not be served until he was himself seated. Suddenly the door opened and the Bishop was advancing, but his eye lighted on Primasso in his shabby garments, and a feeling of disgust took possession of him, though, by habit, he was the most charitable of men. Drawing back and closing the door sharply, he enquired of his servants who that person might be who was seated facing the door. No one knew; for Primasso was a perfect stranger to all. While the Bishop still lingered outside the dining-hall, this unwelcome guest of his began to feel hungry, so, drawing one of the rolls from his pocket, he set to work to eat it. Presently, a servant looked in to see if he were still in the same place. 'My lord,' said this one, returning to the bishop, 'not only is the man there, but he is eating some bread which he seems to have brought with him.' 'Let him eat his own bread,' was the reply, 'for certainly he will not taste of mine to-day.' Though he said this, the Bishop would not go so far as to order Primasso to retire, for he felt this would be too marked an incivility; nevertheless, he hoped the delay in serving the dinner might cause this man to depart unasked.

"Meanwhile, Primasso, having eaten one roll, began upon the second with excellent appetite. He had noticed the prelate's expression at the moment their eyes met, and he partly guessed what was intended when that reverend gentleman failed to reappear. Resolved to hold his ground, and quite indifferent to the impression he was making on those who were seated near, he drew the third roll from his pocket. The Bishop was told that Primasso continued eating, and made no attempt to depart, and, surprised at the man's pertinacity, he began to commune with himself after this manner: 'What unworthy suspicion has entered into my mind? Why do I feel such a contempt for a person of whom I know no harm? A hundred times I have admitted to my table every stranger who presented himself, without considering if he was poor or rich, a noble or a common person, a merchant or a pickpocket? I have been polite even to those whom I knew to be unworthy. I am ashamed of this repug-

nance to the man who has sought my hospitality, and as I have never experienced such a feeling towards the poor, it is very possible that this is really a person of importance.'

"With this conclusion reached, the prelate bade one of his men-servants ask the name of the unknown. The answer came back that it was Primasso, who desired to be a witness of the magnificent hospitality of which men spoke so much.

"His name was well known to the Bishop, who felt covered with confusion for the way in which he had acted towards one so worthy of a welcome. A splendid dinner was served at once, and when it ended, he commanded that a horse and a purse of gold should be presented to this learned scholar, who received moreover an invitation to dine whenever he pleased.

"Primasso was full of gratitude, and thanked his lordship heartily; then he started on the road back to Paris, this time on horseback, instead of trudging wearily on foot."

Bergamino here paused, for his story was ended.

The Marquis had listened in silence, and possessed quite enough penetration to understand why it had been told.

"My friend," he said with a smile, "you have chosen a very good way of making me know your necessity, your merit, and my own meanness. I own that towards you I have not maintained my character for generosity, but I now make amends by according you that which you have adroitly asked of me."

With this, the noble sent for some rich clothing as part of his gift; one of the best horses in his stable was placed at the disposal of Bergamino; and a purse of gold was dropped into his hand.

In addition to all this bounty, his debt at the inn was paid for him by La Scala's orders; therefore, his skill and courage resulted in his returning home a happy and contented man.

THE THREE RINGS.

SALADIN was so great and so valiant a man that by his merits he was raised to the throne of Babylon, and won the glory of many a conquest over both Christians and Saracens. As the Prince was engaged in many costly wars, and moreover was liberal in his expenditure, there came a time when he found his resources so exhausted that he was forced to look around him and consider what he had better do.

By-and-by Saladin remembered that in the town of Alexandria there dwelt a wealthy Jew named Melchisedech, who was accustomed to lend money at interest.

Melchisedech was an avaricious man, and not at all likely to produce such a sum as the King required; but the urgent need he was in determined Saladin to obtain it by force if necessary, therefore he devised a scheme by which he might get the Jew in his power, and sentence him to a fine that should be sufficient to meet the emergency.

So Melchisedech was summoned to the palace, and there received with much honour; presently he had an audience of the King, who spoke to him after this manner: "I have been told great things concerning your wisdom, and especially it is said you have a remarkable knowledge of spiritual subjects. I have sent for you, then, Melchisedech, that you may tell me this. Which of these three religions is the best and the true—that of the Jew, of the Mahomedan, or of the Christian?"

Now, this Jew was crafty, and he perceived that the king was laying a snare for him. If he gave a preference for any one of these religions, his vast wealth—if not his life also—would be the forfeit. Happily for him, he was not easily alarmed, and with wonderful presence of mind he thus made answer to Saladin:

"Sir, the subject on which you question me is beautiful, and of vast importance; but, in order that I may reply in a satisfactory manner, permit me to tell you a little story. I remember hearing—though I cannot say in what country it was—of a rich man, who, amongst other very valuable jewels, possessed a ring of great beauty and inestimable worth. Desiring that the treasure should be guarded suitably, this man devised the project of leaving it to his successors as a memorial of his opulence; therefore, he directed in his will that the son who, at the time of his death, should be found in possession of the ring, might be regarded as his heir, and held in consideration by all the family. The son who thus inherited the costly jewel bequeathed it in much the same terms to his successors, and thus it passed from generation to generation. At length it fell into the hands of a man who was the father of three boys. Each one of these was amiable and excellent, each was submissive to his parent's will, and his love for them was equal. Now, this good man became much perplexed as to how he ought to leave his treasure, for he

loved his sons well, and would gladly have made the three equally happy. He could not single out one son for his good qualities, because all were alike virtuous; thus was it that he devised a method of getting out of a difficulty, for it must be owned that in a moment of weakness he had promised the ring to each of the three young men. Secretly applying to a goldsmith, he had two rings made so perfectly resembling the heirloom, that even he himself could not distinguish the false from the true. The sons received then a ring apiece, and—as may be supposed—this was the ground of bitter contestation as soon as the father died. Each one declared that the rights of succession were his; each one expected to be regarded as the head of the family; each one produced his ring as a proof of his heritage. It was, however, impossible to know the real and the false jewels apart, and a legal process was begun to establish the true succession. This process is so full of intricacy, and so many questions are involved in it, that it is going on to the present day and without any hope of being satisfactorily ended.

"That, my lord, is the story," said the Jew in conclusion; "and as with the ring, so is it with the laws which the Almighty has given to three different people. Each believes that with them is the right of inheritance, each considers that they have the true law, and obey the only true commandments. It is not yet decided which of the three is nearest to the truth, and to all appearance it never will be."

Saladin perceived that the Jew was too wily for him, and he admired the skill with which he had avoided the trap set for him. It would be useless to manœuvre further with a man like this, therefore the king told him of his pressing need of money, and frankly asked for the loan. He was candid enough also to confess what his purpose was if the reply to his question had been less discreet.

Touched by the generosity of this avowal, the Jew was moved to a good will unusual to his character, and produced the large sum which Saladin required. That monarch not only repaid him the money, but made him many gifts and kept him near to his own royal person, treating him with respect and with a real friendship as long as he lived.

HOW AVARICE WAS CURED.

IN olden times there was a merchant of Genoa who had made a handsome fortune,

but because of his niggardliness his own name of Ermino de Grimaldi was almost forgotten, and men knew him best as Ermino the Miser. No one in that part of Italy had such riches, yet no one so grudged every penny he was forced to spend. You may be sure then that he kept his purse-strings tightly drawn if any appeal for charity came his way—indeed, he had such a dread of the smallest outlay that he scarce afforded himself the commonest necessities of life.

While by a thousand mean economies, then, Ermino increased his possessions, he became more and more disliked and despised by his acquaintances. There arrived after a time at Genoa, a French courtier by name Guillaume Boursier. He was of upright and honourable character, generous and affable in his dealings, and with a charming manner of address.

Men of his rank were then in the habit of occupying themselves very much in making peace when families were divided, in promoting suitable alliances, in binding people together in the bonds of friendship. They made it a habit to cultivate a cheerful manner, that, as they mixed with the world, they might enliven others of a more gloomy and morose nature, and give new hope to those who had lost heart and courage under pressure of misfortune.

Guillaume Boursier, therefore, was a welcome visitor to Genoa. He was honoured and fêted by men of all conditions, and thus he frequently had to hear of the failings of Ermino the Miser. It is needless to say that no invitation and no courtesy came to the gallant French gentleman from the avaricious merchant, yet Boursier had a great desire to meet with and talk to him. He therefore paid an unsought visit to Ermino, who having at least kept some remains of good manners, received his guest politely. Encouraged by this favourable beginning, Boursier made himself as pleasant as he could, talking so ably upon different subjects, that at last Ermino took him and one or two more to see a fine new mansion he had lately had erected. "Sir," said he, turning to the French courtier, "you have travelled much, and seen, as it seems to me, everything there is to behold. Can you name to me one single thing which no living creature has seen, and which I can have painted for the ornament of my banqueting-hall?"

There appeared to Boursier something so positively absurd in the question, that he answered it in similar fashion. "If you

were to order an artist to paint you a sneeze, that certainly is a thing which man has not seen, nor ever will see. Seriously, though," he continued, "if you really wish me to give you a suggestion, I should say paint something which I will indicate, but which, I am sure, is not known to you."

"You will be doing me a vast favour," replied Ermino. "Pray tell me what is the subject upon which I shall set an artist to work?"

"Well, then," replied Boursier, "let him execute a painting of liberality."

Ermino stood in silent shame, for he comprehended the reproof, and knew not what to say in his own extenuation. Then, with a rapid resolve to change his ways, and become as generous as other men, he cried: "Sir, I am glad you have given me such an answer. 'Tis true that hitherto I have not understood what liberality is, but now I will have that virtue so set forth upon my walls, that neither you nor any other person shall be able in future to address to me a like reproach."

It is said that from that day Ermino was a changed man. No one in Genoa could be more kind and charitable, no one was so open-hearted in hospitality to strangers; the poor blessed him, the rich respected him, and his old title of "miser" became a thing of the past.

CORRADO'S COOK.

SIGNOR CORRADO was one of the wealthiest citizens of Florence, nor did he spend his money grudgingly. There were few pleasures that he denied himself, but it must also be confessed that he was liberal to his friends and benevolent to the poor. A number of dogs he had, which followed him in his rides about the country, or bore him company at the chase.

One day Signor Corrado returned from his favourite sport with a fine fat crane, which he sent at once to the kitchen, with an order for it to be well roasted, and served for that evening's repast.

We must now explain that Quinquibio, the cook, was a stupid, simple sort of being, held in ridicule among the other servants, though he well understood his own business.

He took the crane, and set about preparing it according to the signor's commands, and by-and-by a most delicious odour ascended from the kitchen. The bird was just upon the point of being sufficiently cooked, when a woman of those parts, who

was very friendly with Quinquibio, came into the kitchen.

"Here is, indeed, something excellent a-roasting," cried she. "I must really taste it, for never in my life did I smell a bird half so good to eat as this must be. Give me just a leg and a wing, Quinquibio; no one will be any the wiser; and there will remain quite enough to send up for the master's supper."

The cook shook his head.

"No, no, Madame Brunetta," said he. "You will get not even a taste of roasted crane from me."

"You will find it to your advantage to do what I ask you," answered the woman in an angry voice. "If you do not, I promise you that I will find a revenge of which you little dream."

After a few words of argument, Quinquibio's scruples were overcome.

"At least there can be small harm done by yielding to her," said he within himself, "and if I refuse, there is no knowing what bad trick she may play on me. I do not want a woman for my enemy."

So the joints were cut from the roasted crane, and Brunetta soon made an end of them, declaring them excellent.

Now it so happened that Corrado had several friends to sup with him that night; indeed, it was a large and a merry party which gathered round the table.

The crane was sent up with one wing and one leg missing, and the cook felt no uneasiness about the matter, for he judged that his master would have no time to notice such a trifling thing.

Unluckily, however, one of the guests observed that the crane had but one leg and one wing, and, thinking it somewhat strange, he took the opportunity of asking Corrado how it was.

"One wing and one leg!" cried the host, and looking closer he saw that his guest was right. "Send the cook here," he said to the servants who waited at table. "I must know what that foolish fellow means, for very sure I am that the crane had his two wings and two legs when I brought him home this morning."

When Quinquibio heard that he was summoned to the supper-room he was desperately frightened.

"Oh, woe for me," cried he, "that ever I suffered Brunetta to enter my kitchen!"

But no excuse could avail him now to escape from close questioning, and the trembling man stood before his master with a sinking heart.

He was, however, a Venetian, and 'tis said that a Venetian never shrinks from any lie that will serve his turn. Quinquibio assured the company, then, that there was nothing at all to be surprised at; a crane never had more than one leg and one wing.

Now this obstinacy roused Signor Corrado's anger, but as his friends were shouting with laughter, and it was not the moment for reproving a servant, he had to content himself with saying but little.

"Begone, rascal!" he exclaimed, turning his flashing eyes full upon the cook. "And, as you are so mighty clever, you shall e'en go out with me to-morrow, and show me some of your wonderful one-legged cranes. It will be the worse for you if you are not able to point them out, let me tell you."

Quinquibio retired to the kitchen well-pleased with himself.

"Methinks I got out of the difficulty rather cleverly," he reflected. "The master was very angry, certainly; but by to-morrow he will have forgotten all about the matter."

But it so happened that Corrado was very far from letting the subject of the crane slip from his mind; it caused him rather a restless night, and he rose at break of day, determined to clear up the mystery and punish his cook severely for his audacity. Calling for his horse to be saddled and bridled, he forced Quinquibio to mount another and ride behind him towards the stream, on the bank of which he had taken the crane that had figured so remarkably on the supper-table.

"We shall see," said he as they went along. "We shall soon see if you are right or wrong, my fine fellow."

The Venetian perceived that he was indeed in a difficult case, and that his master was far too angry to accept any excuse he could make, or to pardon him if he confessed what he had done. He looked around him to see if there was any chance of escape; but Corrado kept a sharp eye on him, and would not suffer him to lag behind so much as a yard or two.

Every object they passed seemed to his excited fancy to be a crane well poised on two legs; what then could he find to say to his infuriated master?

But as they reined in their horses at the stream, Quinquibio was the first to observe several cranes there, and each was standing on one leg.

"See, master," he cried in great glee, "it is just as I told you yesterday, and you

would not believe me. Look for yourself—the cranes have only one leg and one wing apiece.”

“You stupid idiot,” shouted Corrado, “I will soon show you whether they have two legs or not,” and then he cried: “Houp, houp—holloa!” so lustily that, as might be supposed, the frightened birds stretched forth both legs, and ran away out of sight and hearing.

“Now tell me,” said the master, turning sharply on his servant, “do your eyes serve you? or are you blind, as well as stupid? What have you to say for yourself now—have the cranes one leg or two?”

“Sir,” answered Quinquibio humbly, but bethinking him of an answer which might turn the current of Corrado’s wrath, “you did not cry, ‘Houp, houp—holloa!’ at the crane last night. If you had done this, who knows but it might have put its other leg to the ground and run away, as these have done?”

This reply amused Signor Corrado vastly, and he burst into a fit of hearty laughter.

“In truth you are not such a simpleton as men think you,” said he; “for you know how to get out of a difficulty by the help of a ready tongue. There, I forgive you this time; but let there be no more tricks played with my supper.”

Thus, by his ready wit, Quinquibio kept his place in Corrado’s kitchen, and from that time was better thought of, not only by his master, but by his fellow-servants.

APPEARANCES ARE DECEITFUL.

THE Signor de Rabata could not have been called a handsome man, even by his dearest friends. He was small and misformed; he had a flat face, and a nose much like that of a terrier-dog. In a word, this gentleman was so hideous that, search as one might, it would have been impossible to find one worse-favoured, except, perhaps, in the person of the famous painter, Giotto, who, at all events, was scarcely less ugly.

Despite this unattractive appearance, the Signor de Rabata was a very learned person, and was respected by the scholars of the day as the greatest judge on every point of civil law.

These two men—the ugly judge and the ugly artist—lived in the same village, not far from Florence, at the time of my story.

One day, as they were riding in company thence to the city, each being badly mounted and shabbily attired, they were surprised by a heavy rain, which forced them to seek

shelter in a peasant’s hut. The downpour continuing, the friends grew impatient. Therefore, as they knew the man beneath whose roof they were sheltering, they borrowed some clothing of him. He could only offer an old rough cloak of grey felt, and a very bad and ragged hat, which, however, the gentlemen accepted. Thus equipped, they continued their way. After a while, the storm abated, and they fell into conversation. Giotto talked extremely well, no matter what might be the subject, and, as Signor de Rabata listened, he reflected that this was indeed a gifted man. Nevertheless, as he surveyed the painter from head to foot, his ugliness in the borrowed clothing was so striking that he could not refrain from bursting into a loud laugh. Feeling obliged to explain, he said:

“Master Giotto, imagine if anyone met us who had never seen or heard of you. Think you that such an one would take you for the greatest painter in the world?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Giotto promptly. “I think this might be possible, if the same person, in examining you from top to toe, was able to credit you with knowing more than the letters of the alphabet.”

The judge was confounded, for, in ridiculing his companion, he had not realised that his own aspect was equally absurd.

“I was imprudent,” said he humbly. “You have taught me now that one must never ridicule others when one can oneself furnish abundant matter for ridicule also.”

SPRING-HEELED JACK.

It is now nearly half a century since the inhabitants of London and its suburbs were kept in a constant state of terror by a man, who, under various disguises, would suddenly appear before the unsuspecting pedestrian, and, after having nearly frightened the traveller out of his or her senses, would as suddenly disappear with terrible bounds, leaving the impression upon his affrighted victim that his Satanic Majesty had condescended to pay him a visit in person. Evening was the time generally chosen by this eccentric character for his exploits, and, doubtless, there are many living who can recollect the pang of fear which shot through their hearts when, leaping from some dark corner, out of a doorway, or over a hedge, he stood before them.

Who this singular being was, or what the true object of his escapades, can only be

left to conjecture, as he was never captured; certain it is, that robbery was not the motive, for he was never known to take a single coin from his victims, even when fright had rendered them an easy prey, nor did he often practise any other degree of cruelty beyond scaring them, which, however, was quite sufficient, as in some instances the sufferers never thoroughly recovered the shock to their nerves.

The only surmise as to his identity that was ever hazarded, was that he was the Marquis of Waterford—then famous as a ringleader in all that savoured of fun and frolic—but not a shadow of proof could be ever adduced in support of this theory. The more general belief appears to have been that there were several persons concerned in the affair; that they were members of high families, and that the cause of their pranks was a bet of three thousand pounds that they would procure the death of not less than thirty human beings, apportioning them with nice discrimination as follows: eight old bachelors, ten old maids, and six lady's-maids, and as many servant-girls as they could, trusting that by depriving them of their reason they would accelerate their deaths. This is, of course, incredible, but the chief clerk of the Mansion House police-court, in a letter to the newspapers, said it was so reported to a committee that was formed by the Lord Mayor for the purpose of tracking and prosecuting the scoundrels.

It is difficult to assign the exact locality which gave birth to this extraordinary freak, either side of the Thames claiming the distinction; some averring that it was at Hammersmith, others again that it was Barnes. The most trustworthy accounts give the palm to the latter village.

It was in the latter end of 1837, at Barnes, that the ghost made its first appearance in the shape of a large white bull, attacking several persons, more particularly women, many of whom suffered most severely from the fright. At East Sheen, in the form of a white bear, the alleged spirit carried on similar gambols. His ghostship then extended his operations to the town renowned for "maids of honour," and in the course of a few days all Richmond was aghast at the tales of women being frightened to death and of children being torn to pieces by him. The search after the unearthly visitant was here becoming too warm for him, and he shifted the scene of his labours to Ham, Kingston, and Hampton, at which latter

place he was seen, clad in armour of brass, with spring shoes, and large claw-like gloves, but being hotly pursued he scaled the walls of Bushey Park and vanished. Teddington, Twickenham, and Hounslow, all had stories to tell of his appearance, and in Sion Park, the seat of the Duke of Northumberland, many and fearful were the injuries said to have been inflicted by him. At Isleworth a carpenter was seized at eleven o'clock at night, and most unmercifully beaten by the ghost, who was attired in polished steel armour, with red shoes, etc. It must be noted what an exceedingly varied wardrobe this sprite must have had, rendering it very difficult, one would think, for him to move, with such extensive properties, with alacrity from place to place.

The neighbourhood of Uxbridge was the next scene of his pranks, and he approached the metropolis through Hanwell, Brentford, and Ealing, in which last place he was seen in steel armour, striking terror into the inmates of the various schools located there, and frightening the blacksmith of the village so completely as to force him to keep his bed in consequence of the shock he sustained. At Hammersmith he found a determined opponent in the shape of a valorous laundress, to whom he appeared in the form of an immense baboon, six feet high, with enormous eyes, and arms of an extensive length; and in strict keeping with his animal appearance, he grunted like an hyena. This courageous woman, after an ineffectual attempt to avoid her uncanny visitor, determined to give him battle, and flew at him with such fury that he was glad to give up the contest. Even the royal precincts of Kensington Palace did not escape from his visits, children having seen the unearthly being dancing by moonlight on the Palace Green, and ever and anon scaling the walls of the royal forcing-houses.

In consequence of the panic attending these exaggerated stories, the police had strict orders to investigate their truth, but were unable, in the majority of cases, to trace any person who had really seen the apparition. That there was mischief afoot, however, was clearly shown by the applications at the Mansion House and other police-courts for protection.

At Peckham he caused the greatest alarm (judging by a letter to the Lord Mayor, from a resident there), appearing in a new character, as a spectre, and scaring out of

her senses, amongst others, an unfortunate servant-girl who opened a door to him; and the writer also said that seven ladies had been reduced to the same unhappy state through fright at the awful apparition. Letters poured into the Mansion House from all parts of London, showing how universal was the terror which had been inspired by this masquerading miscreant. Several persons, more especially women, were injured bodily in many instances by the claws with which he appears to have armed his hands, and if one writer may be believed, several deaths on the south side of London had been caused by the shock his appearance had given. A letter from St. John's Wood stated that for a whole fortnight that neighbourhood had been favoured with Spring-heeled Jack's attentions; he sometimes appearing as a bear, and sometimes clad in mail. This correspondent asserted that the bet, which was supposed to be the cause of these pranks, was that the monster should kill six women in some given time.

That his appearance was calculated to upset even the stoutest-hearted must be admitted, for the Lord Mayor himself, though much inclined to be sceptical, acknowledged that he had been given to understand, on undoubted authority, that in the vicinity of Forest Hill, where he resided, one of the female servants of a gentleman who lived near his house had been terrified into fits by the sudden appearance of a figure clad in a bear's skin, which, upon being drawn aside, exhibited the human body, with long horns—emblematical of Satan himself—clad in a suit of mail.

The "ghost" did not disdain to avail himself of material means of conveyance occasionally, as is shown by a letter to the *Morning Herald*, January 16th, 1838, from "A Resident on Paddington Green," who stated that he had seen, close to his house, a figure clad in white, closely pursued by two men, and, after a smart chase, this matter-of-fact apparition jumped into a cabriolet, and was driven out of the reach of his would-be captors.

A Committee was formed at the Mansion House in January, 1838, for the purpose of receiving subscriptions, and to decide upon the best means of capturing this uneasy spirit, and of visiting it with the punishment which it so richly deserved.

In sending a donation of five pounds to the fund, a gentleman residing at Dulwich wrote that his daughter was lying in a very dangerous state, having been

nearly deprived of her senses by the sudden appearance of a figure enveloped in a white sheet and blue fire, which had met her on her return home from a friend's house; others equally testified to injuries received at the hands of the hobgoblin. A reward of ten pounds was offered for the apprehension of the heartless scoundrel, but unhappily it completely failed in its object, and the perpetrator of this ghastly "joke" continued to be at large.

Thinking, perhaps, that he had done as much harm as he desired in the other parts of London, for a whole month Spring-heeled Jack devoted himself to disturbing the peace of mind of the dwellers in the East End of the metropolis, the neighbourhood of Bow being particularly patronised by him. One gross outrage came before the police-magistrate at Lambeth Street, and caused considerable attention.

A young lady, named Alsop, living with her parents in the vicinity of Bow, stated that at about a quarter to nine o'clock on the evening of February 21, 1838, she heard a violent ringing at the front gate of the house, and on going to the door to see what was the cause, she saw a man standing outside, of whom she enquired what was the matter. The person instantly replied that he was a policeman, and said: "For God's sake bring me a light, for we have caught Spring-heeled Jack here in the lane." She returned into the house, and brought a candle and handed it to the man, who was enveloped in a large cloak. The instant she had done so, however, he threw off his outer garment, and applying the lighted candle to his breast, presented a most hideous and frightful appearance, and vomited forth a quantity of blue and white flame from his mouth, his eyes resembling red balls of fire. From the hasty glance which her fright enabled her to get at his person, she observed that he wore a large helmet, and his dress, which appeared to fit him very tight, seemed to her to resemble white oil-skin. Without uttering a sentence he darted at her, and catching her partly by her dress, and the back part of her neck, placed her head under one of his arms, and commenced tearing her clothes with his claws, which she was certain were made of some metallic substance. She screamed out as loud as she could for assistance, and by considerable exertion got away from him, and ran towards the house to get in. Her assailant, however, followed, and caught her on the doorstep, when he again used

considerable violence, tore her neck and arms with his claws, as well as a quantity of hair from her head; but she was at length rescued from him by one of her sisters. Her story was fully corroborated by her parents and sisters, and her injuries, which were very considerable, bore unmistakable testimony to the truth of the assault.

Subsequently in Bow Fair Fields Jack narrowly escaped capture by some workmen, and it was only by his extreme agility, and intimate knowledge of the locality, that he got clear off. Two men were arrested as being concerned in this affair—one a master-bricklayer, and the other a carpenter; but after a very long and searching investigation at Lambeth Street police-court, they were discharged, as they were not fully identified as being the actual perpetrators, though it was certain they knew something more about the matter than they chose to acknowledge.

Another sample of the ghost's playful ways in the East End of London, was shown by a statement made before the magistrate at Lambeth Street police-court, March 8, 1838, by a Miss Scales, who deposed that as she and her sister were walking in Limehouse about half-past eight in the evening, on coming to Green Dragon Alley they observed some person standing in an angle in the passage. She was in advance of her sister at the time, and just as she came up to the person, who was enveloped in a large cloak, he spirted a quantity of blue flame right in her face, which deprived her of her sight, and so alarmed her, that she instantly dropped to the ground and was seized with violent fits, which continued for several hours. This individual was described as tall, thin, and of gentlemanly appearance, and carried in front of him a small lamp, similar to those used by the police; he did not utter a word, nor did he attempt to lay hands on the young woman, but walked away in an instant.

Not confining himself to the crowded parts of the metropolis, he made the suburbs his hunting-ground, and terrorised both sides of the Thames to such an extent that but few females would venture out after dark without sufficient escort. He visited Blackheath in a truly novel and marvellous manner. Three ladies were crossing the heath at about six o'clock, when they suddenly came upon a monstrous figure before them, and as the lamps had been lit some time, they had a good view

of it. The monster, they said, had a phosphoric lustre, showed tremendous long ears, horns and tail like those of a bullock. One of the ladies fell down in a fit, and the other two had resort to that potent weapon in the female armoury, a good scream, which promptly brought a policeman to their assistance, and on his bold advance the apparition threw itself over his head and disappeared on the heath, during which gymnastic performance, it was said, the hooks, or springs, on his heels were distinctly visible.

In a pamphlet, published at the time, we have preserved to us a portrait of the "ghost," as he appeared in this instance, and the representation even, much less the reality, is quite enough to upset the nerves of any ordinary-minded person. He is depicted as clad in all the orthodox details of a satanic outfit, horns, tail, etc., with fearful claws on both hands and feet, the latter additionally armed with large hooks, attached to the heels, whilst his countenance puts any mediæval conception of the Evil One quite to the blush. No wonder, then, the ladies are shown as suffering an extremity of terror, with their mouths extended to their utmost capacity, presumably screaming.

In another tract there is a similar portrait of this man-fiend, its horrors being heightened by being highly-coloured, and there he is represented as appearing in a churchyard to two women.

In a third booklet he appears as in half-armour, with helmet, etc., his nether limbs being clad in a species of fox-hunting costume, a huge cloak adorning his back.

Having alarmed the dwellers on the south side of the Thames, so as nearly to deprive them of their senses, he again crossed the water, and appeared to a party of people near Holloway in the guise of a bear. Here, however, he met with a reception he hardly contemplated, for there being a brickfield handy, the men of the party treated him to a shower of bricks, a mode of treatment which he by no means relished, and which induced him to beat a speedy retreat.

One evening, near Lord Holland's gate at Kensington, a gaunt figure, accoutred like Don Quixote, and covered with spikes, was seen striding along the road, and, after staring in the faces of some labouring men, disappeared in an instant. These men, it is said, went into a beer-shop in the vicinity, and then relating what they had seen, they again went to the place

where the figure had appeared, in expectation of its return. However, they did not meet it, but they saw an uncouth monster, having the shape of an enormous baboon, playing its antics beneath some trees which overhung the road. As they approached the creature sprang up on the branches and disappeared, Spring-heeled Jack, of course, being credited with this mysterious occurrence.

Hackney was favoured with an extraordinary vision of this many-shaped intruder on the public peace, for he appeared, so the story runs, in the shape of a lamp-lighter walking on his head and hands, and carrying his ladder between his feet, to which was suspended a lantern of large dimensions, amply lighted. And this curious creature, on being approached, somersaulted so high, that those who saw it were utterly astonished. But this, surely, is rather more than even the most credulous ought to be expected to swallow, and the story must have been manufactured to feed the public taste for the marvellous.

Another glimpse of him was had on the road to Woolwich, when a blue flame issued from his mouth, and a girl who witnessed it fell into fits. His dress on this occasion is described as that of a gentleman, with the somewhat startling addition of a wide strip of scarlet down the back of his coat. Being pursued, he sprang over the fences as usual, and was out of sight in an instant. Still lingering in Kent, he was found the following night at Dartford, where he was clad in a bear-skin, and amused himself with the mischievous trick of putting out the town gas and leaving the streets in darkness. The ubiquity of the fellow was something wonderful, and tended, of course, very much to enhance his fame; no sooner was he heard of in Kent than he turned up at Hampstead Heath, springing over the furze-bushes and somersaulting over the gravel-pits.

So numerous were the tales told of Spring-heeled Jack that a good many must be supposed to be true; whilst, on the other hand, great allowance must be made for credulity, some people not being content with the marvellous as they find it, but being only too happy to add thereto. As a final specimen of the nonsense circulated about his appearance, perhaps the following is the best. A wonderful sight, it was said, was witnessed on Primrose Hill one evening. On the summit appeared a huge figure of a man, in a flame of pale blue;

it then assumed the bulk of a massive elephant, then of a windmill in full operation, and lastly, in lessening its dimensions, it became a large ball of snow, which rolled down the hill, and escaped further notice. What Spring-heeled Jack had to do with this dreadful appearance is not at all clear, but it was attributed to him, nevertheless, such was the hold that he had obtained over the public mind.

Whether too much attention was beginning to be paid to him with a view to his capture, or whether his love of mischief had died out, cannot be told, but certain it was that nothing was known publicly of this singular being after April, 1838, having kept London in a ferment of excitement and terror for about six months. The foregoing are only a few of the stories, veracious or otherwise, that were related of him, space not permitting any more detailed account to be given.

The notoriety this fellow had obtained seems to have had the effect of making many silly young men emulous to enact the ruffian in a small way, considering it the height of cleverness to frighten women and children out of their wits, under the belief that Spring-heeled Jack was attacking them. Many cowardly assaults on women were reported in various parts of the metropolis, under the impression, doubtless, that it was all a "lark;" but it was a joke the victims hardly appreciated, as, should they scream out in their terror, their unmanly assailants did not hesitate to strike them with their fists in the mouth, in order to silence them.

One of these imitators of Jack, a young footman, who had kept the inhabitants of Kilburn in considerable alarm by sallying out upon them disguised as a ghost, in a white sheet and hideous mask, from which depended a long beard, was captured and fined four pounds, which seems hardly an adequate sentence for the offence, seeing how seldom these gentry gave justice a chance of punishing them.

In a satirical paper, *The Age*, of March 11, 1838, is found a recipe for the cure of "spring-heels" in "Jacks": "Take of peas, pepper, salt, and gunpowder an equal amount. Fiat mixture in blunderbusii without 'scruple.' Make application in the region of the 'os coccygis,' and let fly. We are happy in having the best opinion that no person afflicted with 'Spring-heeled Jackism' can withstand the effects of this treatment of his nervous system." Undoubtedly, if this pre-

scription had been followed extensively in its entirety by the inhabitants of London, there would not have been much more heard of the pranks of these cowardly fellows, whose only redeeming point was that they abstained from plundering those who had been weak enough to be frightened by their appearance.

OUR SHINING RIVER.

I.

NOTHING was ever seen like Paddington Station on that particular morning—businesslike Paddington, with its long rows of white railway-coaches continually gliding away to distant parts; with its platforms and their constantly-changing groups, and the great piles of luggage that accumulate as fast as they are wheeled away by busy porters. All this ordinary, workaday aspect of the familiar terminus is for the moment effaced. Wonderful toilettes of the whitest, the creamiest, the most refreshing; pretty faces under the most ravishing of hats, go to form a white and radiant cloud of womankind, which has invaded and taken possession of the scene. And instead of the usual sombre foil of masculine garments, we have all kinds of brilliant and startling arrangements of colour—in jerseys, and jumpers, and gay caps, and parti-coloured ribbons—combined with white flannels. Festive trains are freighted fast with all these festive people—the newest and brightest of saloon-carriages, each appropriated to some club or private party; and instead of brown portmanteaux and black bullock-trunks, we have baskets of flowers and fruits by way of luggage, with tempting-looking picnic-baskets, and bundles of white sunshades, or parti-coloured Japanese umbrellas.

All the gay crowd is moving to and fro with a perfectly distracting play of colour in the tempered sunshine that filters through the great glass roof. I am dazed, bewildered, and experience, also, a certain sadness in the thought that none of these bright and pleasing young women are looking out for me. Indeed, I had no share in the bright glances and pleasant recognitions, and thus it was a relief to be seized upon by an active porter, whose instinct of self-interest had kept him clear of the crowd of feminine passengers, for women, however costly their array, are generally more lavish of smiles and thanks than of shillings and half-crowns. "This

way, sir; here's your friend a-waiting for you. She's jest off, is the fast train, and she'll run afore these specials."

And so I found myself and my belongings shot into a smoking carriage as the train moved on, while opposite sat my friend Charlwood Pycroft, generally known as Charley, who gripped my hand and arm with some fervour.

"You got my telegram, then, from Paris? So good of you to come."

The fact was, that I had got into the habit of being very much at Charley's beck and call, who was an erratic kind of being; often lost sight of for months, or years even, and then making known his existence in a peremptory way by telegraph, asking me, perhaps, to meet the Cunard boat at Queenstown, or to run over to Marseilles to join him in a yachting trip in the Mediterranean. Generally speaking, when Charley had recourse to me, he was in some kind of a scrape. And I guessed pretty confidently that something was the matter now, for beneath the superficial cheerfulness of his greeting there lurked a settled kind of gloom.

Poor Charley! he had been left to his own devices at an early age, with a nice little property, including a pleasant old mansion on the Thames, where his family had lived for generations in credit and good repute. How much was left for him now? Very little, I fancied, for already had appeared in the Times a preliminary announcement of the sale of Pycroft Court, with all its lands and demesnes. Soon, no doubt, I should hear from Charley's own lips how it had happened that matters had come to this pass. In the meantime, we beguiled the way with ordinary conversation.

"What has brought you over from Paris in such a hurry?" I asked.

"Arthur, my boy," replied Charley gloomily, "it was baccarat. Had a cruel time of it. Lost fifty thousand francs to the marquis—cleared me out, and came home partly to see you."

"And partly to see somebody else," I interposed. "Oh, I have heard something about your affairs, although you have kept me so much in the dark."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Charley, flushing, and looking embarrassed; "you can't have heard anything about her——"

"About the little cousin who is to redeem the fortunes of young Prodigal? Yes, I have been told——"

"Oh, as for Claudia, everybody knows about that," said Charley, frowning; "that old donkey of an uncle of mine has been putting our names together all over the place. She is the bane of my existence, don't you see. I always associate her with a run of ill-luck at baccarat, or the wrong horse winning the Derby."

"The girl is something of a fright, then?" I hazarded, thinking that my friend's aversion to the match that would save him must have some sufficient reason.

"Well, not exactly a fright," replied Charley carelessly, "but a sallow, bread-and-butter kind of schoolgirl. Here, I've got her photograph. You can judge for yourself."

Mr. Pyecroft produced a photograph from a handsome case, and handed it to me. The portrait was that of a young girl with large clear eyes, a forehead broad and low, the features perhaps hardly regular enough to be handsome, but the mouth mobile and sensitive, with the lips just parted and disclosing a set of firm, pearl-like teeth. Although there was the semblance of a smile on the face, yet the general expression of the features was rather of the pensive cast. Altogether the photograph gave the impression of a refined and sensitive girl, who was, perhaps, not over happy in her surroundings; or who might be regretting the absence or coldness of her lover. I looked at Charley to read in his face some explanation of this sorrowful air, but the young man at this moment had his whole attention fixed upon another portrait, at which he looked with rapt and passionate gaze. Becoming conscious that I was looking at him, he hastily put back the case into his pocket, forgetting his cousin's portrait, which last I placed in my own pocket.

Now if Mr. Pyecroft considered his cousin to be the bane of his life, no doubt there was an antidote somewhere in existence. As to this surmise, which I presently expressed, Charley nodded a decisive affirmative.

"A girl," he said, "who suits me down to the ground. A jolly, sensible, true-hearted girl, who takes an interest in me, and in everything I like, except, by the way, in gambling, which she always sets her face against. Ah," added Charley with a sigh, "if I had taken her advice I should have been a different man now, and able to please myself. Whereas, behold me now, bound to the chariot-wheels of my uncle."

But then, why should Charley's uncle

object to his pleasing himself in the matter of his affections, and why also should he want to unite his daughter, a well-dowered young woman, to an impoverished young prodigal? Charley winced at this description of himself, but owned that it was not exactly unjust. As for his uncle's motives, they were not far to seek. He was not a real Pyecroft, it seemed, but had married Charley's aunt, and assumed his wife's name. Thus he had become a bigoted devotee to the Pyecroft creed, that the Pyecrofts were the salt of the earth, and that no honours were like unto theirs. And with Uncle Pyecroft's dollars the ancestral belongings of the family might soon be redeemed from the hands of the Jews, and Pyecroft Court would resume its place among the grand houses of the county.

Charley admitted that he saw no other issue to the matter than to sacrifice himself and his cousin to the family interests.

"We shall be wretched together for a year or so, and then I shall fly back to my old ways, and after that——"

"Hanwell!" I remarked, looking out of the carriage-window as the train sped past a fine range of buildings with a mediæval gateway jealously closed with iron bars, all embowered among the luxuriant foliage.

"Yes, it will be Hanwell for one of us," rejoined Charley gloomily. And then he began to tell me of the plans he had lately formed. How he had by clever management—involving the sacrifice to his uncle of his remaining interest in the family estate—contrived to scrape together a few thousand pounds in ready money, with which he had intended to settle as a sheep-farmer in Australia, having first married his sweetheart, Rebecca Thomas. Rebecca had a little money of her own; her people being well-to-do if a trifle vulgar. Her father, a decent old fellow, had long kept the Crab and Flowerpot, a well-frequented hostelry on the river. There was a mother, jolly and good-natured, who was almost too fond of her presumptive son-in-law; a brother, too, whom Charley allowed to be objectionable. The old man had made money and retired, and now lived in his own little place not far from Uncle Pyecroft's manor-house in Gloucestershire, and waged continual war with the squire as to fishing and riparian rights on the river; and thus, apart from all other considerations, was anything but a persona grata to the people at Charlwood Hall. Every year, however, Mr. Thomas contrived to

get afloat on his favourite River Thames, revisiting his old haunts and friends, and fishing and boating to his heart's content. Henley was always one of his stopping-places, where he moored his house-boat and entertained his old friends and customers with free hospitality, not without a discreet eye to business, for he had launches and house-boats of his own, that he would let on terms advantageous to himself as a matter of grace and favour.

But Rebecca, added Charley with a despairing sigh, although happy enough in her life at home, was sufficiently devoted to her lover to follow him to the end of the world. And she had entered into the Australian scheme with fervour—all had been settled between the pair—and then with all this money at command, Charley had thought no harm could come of a run to Paris by himself to take a parting glance at old haunts and associates. Then had followed the fatal baccarat, the final clearing out, and the consequent shipwreck of the Australian project. And Charley, who had promised to be at Henley to make final arrangements with Rebecca, was now on his way there to tell her that there was nothing left for him but to give her up and save himself from utter ruin by marrying the fated bane of his existence.

"I haven't the heart to break it to her myself," said Charley in a husky voice. "And I want you to do it for me, old chappie, as kindly and as gently as you can."

"Ah, there is Windsor Castle," I observed in a chilly voice, as over the green plain, with its groves and tufted hedges, rose the massive walls and towers of the royal fortress-palace, with England's standard floating lazily in the hazy sunshine from the great Round Tower. "Queen there, eh? I suppose she'll be going north before long."

"Never mind about Windsor Castle," said Charley, putting his hand persuasively upon my shoulder. "Say you'll do this for me, old fellow. No," he added, as he saw my repugnance to the task written plainly in my face. "Well, if anyone had told me that Arthur Penrice would desert an old friend in his need, I would have struck him, by Jove! and——"

Here we stopped at Slough, and a rush of people to the door of our carriage stopped the fervid flow of Charley's eloquence.

"Oh, I say," he went on, as somebody pulled vigorously at the door, which was difficult to open, "here is a thundering old

woman trying to get in. Madam," as the door opened, and a full-blown, elderly face appeared in the opening, "this is a smoking-carriage."

"Don't mind at all," said the new comer, hauling herself vigorously in. "Hi! Clara, plenty of room here," calling to her daughter, who was looking after the luggage. And then with a look of growing recognition on her ruddy face as she stared at my companion: "Surely I know that face, though I can't for the moment give it a name. Ah, how de do, Mr. Charlwood Pyecroft? I don't know you so well as the Charlwood Hall Pyecrofts; your uncles, I think. True, so they are. Clara," as the daughter entered the carriage rather breathless from her hurried visit to the luggage-van, a plain, sensible-looking young woman. "Clara, you know that face—Mr. Pyecroft, of course."

"Yes, I see," said Clara, nodding coolly to my companion. You could see that one of her missions in life was to moderate the exuberances of her too demonstrative mamma. "Going to Henley, I suppose? What a pity we did not think of Henley! Such a nuisance, all this crowd and bustle!"

"Well, we should not have seen Mr. Pyecroft otherwise," remarked the elder lady benevolently. "Oh, I have met Miss Pyecroft several times lately—grown a charming girl. Cousin, is it not? Am I to congratulate you? A little bird has whispered——"

"The little bird ought to be shot, Mrs. Boothby," replied Charlwood ungraciously.

"Perhaps it was only a prophetic bird, like the raven in the poem, that croaked 'Never more!'" cried Clara, with a shrewd glance towards Charley, who seemed to wince a little under the young woman's straightforward glance.

"My dear Clara," remonstrated the mother, "to talk of ravens and weddings in the same breath! Really, quite unlucky. But perhaps we shall meet again soon. We are promised at the Hall for certain festivities, I think, Clara. That is, if my rheumatism permits. Not that it's really rheumatism. They call it so, but it's something medical science cannot fathom, and now I'm ordered to Leamington, peremptorily, by the doctors."

"Mamma, they said you might go where you pleased," interposed the too truthful Clara.

"Ah, that shows how badly they think of the case," continued Mrs. Boothby,

undismayed. "But, health and strength permitting, we are sure to meet at the Hall. And we must lose you now positively!" for Charley was getting his papers and things together, preparatory for the stoppage at Twyford.

"Mrs. Boothby," said Charley in accents of expostulation, "you are sitting on my Punch, surely."

"Well, really, so I am," said Mrs. Boothby, jumping up vivaciously. "No harm done, I hope?"

Charley eyed the flattened periodical with some repugnance, but finally packed it up among his other papers, and in a few minutes we were among the crowd upon the platform at Twyford, standing wedged up against the wall in a not unpleasing crush of gay costumes and pretty faces, while a roaring express to London rushed past.

The day was hot, but not unpleasantly glaring, as we made our way from the station to Henley Bridge—one of those stately bridges of which builders seem now to have lost the secret, harmonising so well with the sparkling river, the white swans, and gay pleasure-boats. And then the wonderful sight from the crown of the bridge, the bright river enclosed in meadows and luxuriant hills, the old red town, with its hotels and boathouses, almost masked with gay bunting, and its wharves and landing-stages concealed by a floating street of brightly coloured house-boats, stretching as far as the eye can reach, the flat roofs adorned with beds of flowers and parterres of gay costumes! Below you can hardly see the water for the boats that cross and recross, and collide, and separate, and shoot to and fro with bewildering effect. Steady family boats; light outriggers; crank canoes of the Canadian type; Venetian gondolas, with gondoliers in character, who seem as much at home on the Thames as on the Lido; there is hardly a craft that floats upon inland waters that has not a representative here. And when the gun sounds to clear the course, you wonder how the seething mass of boats can be packed any closer to leave a lane of water for the racing boats. Then the gay coats and glittering badges of the Thames watermen become evident in the throng, as gradually the watery concourse is brought into something like order. The band plays, a gleam of bright sunshine brings all the glitter of the scene into almost painful prominence, and then through the lane of rippling waters two or three boats are seen struggling to the

winning-post. It is all the more in character with the scene that the racing is not of the most arduous description. It is a gay and sumptuous fête in which everybody cares more to see and be seen, and for cool drinks and luxurious luncheons, than for any display of obstinate pluck and endurance.

Charley surveys the scene from the bridge with eyes that have only one object, and that object is soon attained, for he seizes me by the arm. "There is Mr. Thomas's house-boat," he cries, "half-way down towards the island."

She was a pretty little house-boat that Mr. Thomas had named—with graceful recognition of the source of this and kindred luxuries—The Crab, while rows of flower-pots all round with their load of brilliant flowers completed the allusion. Mr. Thomas himself, a grey, cautious-looking man in a broad-brimmed straw hat and white linen suit, was standing at the foot of the ladder covered with red baize; the wife, almost purple with heat, was fanning herself in the most shady spot to be found, while on the roof, surrounded by a lot of young boating men in their gay, parti-coloured clothing, sat a handsome, showy young woman—evidently Rebecca.

There was much in the appearance of Rebecca to justify Charley's infatuation—fine contours and nobly-cut features, dark, expressive eyes, and raven-black hair, which was massed in a splendid club that hung almost to her heels. With all these attractions, I could no longer wonder that a young fellow should fall madly in love with her. I felt that I could do it myself were Charley out of the way; and out of the way it seemed he wished to be, his madness, after all, not carrying him to any violent lengths in the way of self-assertion. Yes, I actually felt pained as I saw the bright light that flashed into Rebecca's dark eyes. For such a gleam of joyful recognition from those eyes I acknowledged that it would be possible to throw away Pyecroft Court, and Charlwood Hall into the bargain.

"Ah, here's our young squire!" cried Mr. Thomas, removing with his right hand his long white clay-pipe from his mouth, while with his left he familiarly grasped young Charlwood by the arm. "I won't say you're unexpected. Here, Becky," hailing the upper deck, "here's an old friend come to see you. Now, what is it to be? Shandy-gaff or champagne? I've got 'em all here?"

Mother, you come and get something for the captain. We must treat him well now he's here. He don't come for nothing, I expect—do he, mother?"

But you will hardly believe the ruffianly trick that Charley played me at this moment. Hardly taking any notice of Mr. Thomas or his greetings, Charlwood walked half-way up the companion-ladder, and beckoned Rebecca to come to him. She advanced with rather a scared expression, for she saw that something was wrong in her lover's face.

"Rebecca," said Pyecroft, "this is my great friend, Mr. Penrice, of whom I have often spoken. Please make him welcome for half an hour, while I fulfil a pressing engagement elsewhere." And, without another word, he sprang into the little dingey that was moored alongside, and ferried himself over to the opposite shore, where he quickly disappeared in the crowd of spectators and mountebanks.

"And what's the captain's little game now?" said Mr. Thomas angrily, knitting his grey brows under his broad-brimmed hat. "Ain't over civil, I think, to cut away like that."

"I'll be off after him, governor," said a young black-eyed youth, coming forward—evidently the son, and a disagreeable rendering of his pretty sister—the same cast of features, but bloated and unwholesome-looking, with a costume of bright, red-striped flannel, with a gaudy muffler and gaudier cap.

"No, you stop where you are, Dick; or go off to The Lion, and take your friends with you," said Rebecca to her brother in a tone of authority. "And will you come and sit down, Mr. Penrice, and see the races? The course is just cleared for one. I think it's the Wingfield Sculls."

Whatever the description of race might have been, I don't think that either Rebecca or I saw much of it. She tried, poor girl, to make conversation, and I, too, strove from the vasty depths of my indignation at Charley's trick to fish out something that might be acceptable to the ears of a pretty girl. But the thing was a dead failure. Soon we came to a complete silence. The young boating-men had withdrawn to their own devices. Rebecca and I had the flower-spangled deck to ourselves, while we could hear below Mr. and Mrs. Thomas and their son discussing Mr. Pyecroft's affairs with not unreasonable bitterness. The wind blew, the flags waved, the waters rippled, boats shot to and fro, but

all passed like a dream before my eyes, all my attention fixed upon the miserable business before me. I felt that if my friend had asked me to throw the girl into the water, and drown her, I could have done it more easily than sit thus and tell her in cold blood that all the happiness of her life was ended. After all, Rebecca was the first to speak. She drew her chair closer to me, and said in a quiet, strained voice:

"You have some message for me from Charley—from Mr. Pyecroft?"

THOUGHT-READING EXTRA-ORDINARY.

[It is my duty to tell the reader that this narrative has appeared in print already. It was published in the (now extinct) University Magazine, in July, 1878. I reproduce it, word for word, as it there appeared, and, for so doing, I have the kind consent of Dr. Keningale Cook, who was proprietor and editor of the magazine. Besides avoiding a charge of vain repetition, I have another motive for making this declaration. I wish it to be clearly understood that my facts were placed on record within a very short time of their occurrence, and when they were perfectly fresh in my memory. In 1878 people's attention had not been aroused, as it has been of late, by the exploits of the thought-readers and others who claim occult powers. Had I kept the record of my strange experience in my own breast until now, I might be reasonably suspected of embellishing my facts to suit recent developments of occult speculation. From this point of view it seems to me fortunate that my record has already appeared in print, drawn up at a time when both my memory and my motives were beyond suspicion.]

"Early in January, 1877, I was stationed at Moradabad, in Rohilkund. My wife was in England invalided; so, instead of living alone, I had adopted a common and convenient Indian fashion and was "chumming" with a friend. My chum was Mr. Carmichael-Smyth, acting Superintendent of Police for the district. One day Mr. Smyth told me that he expected to receive a visit from a native, an amateur conjuror, who would perform some amusing tricks. It so happened that on the same day we were waited on by a Parsee pedlar, who wanted to sell us ivory and sandal-wood carvings, and such-like knick-knacks, which are the usual stock-in-trade of the Parsee travelling merchants. While we were

chaffering with this man the conjuror was announced, and was shown into the common sitting-room. He was followed by a crowd of our servants—for the native of every rank loves a conjuror, and gazes on a conjuring performance with the simple admiration of a child.

"There was nothing very remarkable in the appearance or dress of our conjuror. An elderly man, short and sparely made, dressed in dingy white cotton, with very tight sleeves to his robe and very tight legs to his drawers; he might have been a respectable servant out of place, but actually was a small landowner who had taken to conjuring for his amusement.

"When he entered the room he spread a white cloth upon the floor and sat down upon it with his back to the wall, the door of the room being on his right hand. His spectators were disposed in the following fashion: Mr. Smyth sat on a chair nearly in the middle of the room, I was sitting on a sofa near the door, the Parsee merchant stood in the doorway about arm's length from me. The servants stood about in groups, the largest group being between the door and the conjuror. As soon as he had settled himself he turned to the Parsee and asked for the loan of a rupee. The pedlar at first demurred a little, but, on being guaranteed against loss, he produced the coin. He was going to put it into the conjuror's hand, but the latter refused and told the Parsee to hand it to Mr. Smyth's bearer. The bearer took it, and, at the request of the conjuror, looked at it and declared it to be really a rupee. The conjuror then told him to hand it to his master. Mr. Smyth took it, and then followed this dialogue: Conjuror: Are you sure that is a rupee? Smyth: Yes. Conjuror: Close your hand on it and hold it tight. Now, think of some country in Europe, but do not tell me your thought (then the conjuror ran over the names of several countries, such as France, Germany, Russia, Turkey, and America—for the native of India is under the impression that America is in Europe). After a moment's pause Mr. Smyth said he had thought of a country. 'Then open your hand,' said the juggler, 'see what you have got, and tell me if it is a coin of the country you thought of.' It was a five-franc piece, and Mr. Smyth had thought of France. He was going to hand the coin to the conjuror, but the latter said: 'No, pass it to the other sahib.' Mr. Smyth accordingly put the five-franc piece into

my hand; I looked closely at it, then shut my hand and thought of Russia. When I opened it I found, not a Russian but a Turkish silver piece about the size of the five-franc, or of our own crown-piece. This I handed to Mr. Smyth, and suggested that he should name America, which he did, and found a Mexican dollar in his hand. The coin, whatever it was, had never been in the conjuror's hand from the time the rupee was borrowed from the Parsee merchant. Mr. Smyth and his bearer had both of them closely examined the rupee, and Mr. Smyth and I turned over several times the five-franc piece, the Turkish coin, and the dollar; so the trick did not depend on a reversible coin. Indeed, it could not, for the coin underwent three changes, as has been seen. I need only add, for the information of those readers who know not India, that a rupee is only about the size of a florin, and therefore about half the weight of a five-franc piece.

"The juggler performed several other tricks that day, but they were of a commonplace kind and in no way comparable to the coin trick, which I have never seen rivalled by any other conjuror in India or Europe.

"The following evening Mr. Smyth and I were to dine at the mess of the Twenty-eighth Native Infantry. We told some of our friends in the regiment of the tricks our juggler had shown us; they asked us to invite the man to perform after dinner in the mess drawing-room. He came accordingly, and began by showing some very commonplace tricks. I wanted him to do the coin trick, but he made some excuse. I should mention that one of the officers was himself an amateur conjuror, and Mr. Smyth introduced him and our juggler to each other as comrades in art magic. Possibly our juggler may have been afraid that the captain would detect his method; or perhaps he only felt nervous about repeating a trick which must have depended very much on mere guesswork. Be that as it may, he would not perform the coin trick at the mess. But he did another almost equally wonderful.

"As before, he was seated on a white cloth, which this time I think was a tablecloth, borrowed from the mess-sergeant. He asked some one present to produce a rupee, and to lay it down at the remote edge of the cloth. The cloth being three or four yards in length, the conjuror could not have touched the coin without being

seen, and, in fact, did not touch it. He then asked for a signet-ring. Several were offered him, and he chose out one which had a very large oval seal, projecting well beyond the gold hoop on both sides. This ring he tossed and tumbled several times in his hands, now throwing it into the air and catching it, then shaking it between his clasped hands, all the time mumbling half-articulate words in some Hindostanee patois. Then setting the ring down on the cloth at about half-arm's length in front of him, he said, slowly and distinctly in good Hindostanee: 'Ring, rise up and go to the rupee.' The ring rose, with the seal uppermost, and resting on the hoop, slowly, with a kind of dancing or jerking motion, it passed over the cloth until it came to where the rupee lay on the remote edge; then it lay down on the coin. The conjuror then said: 'Ring, lay hold of the rupee, and bring it to me.' The projecting edge of the seal seemed to grapple the edge of the coin; the ring and the rupee rose into a kind of wrestling attitude, and, with the same dancing or jerking motion, the two returned to within reach of the juggler's hand.

"I have no theory of any kind to explain either of these tricks. I should mention, however, that the juggler entirely disclaimed all supernatural power, and alleged that he performed his tricks by mere sleight of hand. It will be observed that he had no preparation of his surroundings, no machinery, and no confederate."

GERALD.

BY ELEANOR C. PRICE.

CHAPTER XXV. MR. GOODALL IN PERPLEXITY.

GERALD FANE had come down to Deerhurst on Friday; his letters from Locarno had been waiting for him there since Thursday morning. On that morning two foreign letters had also reached Woodcote House, and had been read by John Goodall at his early breakfast.

He was alone. Mrs. Fraser was staying in the house, taking care of Helen like a kind stepmother, but she did not come down to breakfast till two hours later, and this was a comfort to John, who was not very fond of Mrs. Fraser. She talked a good deal of nonsense, he thought, and was inclined to patronise him.

John, having unlocked the post-bag, read Theo's letter first, her long one to Helen, and her little note of congratula-

tion to himself. His face lengthened very considerably, for he was fond of Theo, and did not at all like the notion of her throwing herself away.

"Just like her! Didn't I say so? And Helen wouldn't believe me. Cool chap that young Fane! All our fault, I suppose, for having her down here. This will put Helen in an awful fuss."

With these meditations, he went on steadily eating his breakfast. Must Helen be told? Should he send the letter up to Mrs. Fraser and ask her to tell the news as she thought best? No, he did not like that plan. He had not much confidence in Mrs. Fraser.

Then he took up Lady Redcliff's letter, which he had not noticed at first. This made him open his eyes and whistle, and pull a longer face than before, though he smiled at first at her ladyship's peremptory style.

"Poor Theo!" he reflected, "of course her grandmother is right; it is a mad notion altogether—not that I ever actually called Litton a swindler—but it's a disagreeable business, and I wish anybody would tell me what I ought to do. One thing, I'll take care that Helen knows nothing about it till she is stronger—and so Mrs. Fraser shall not hear of it from me."

After this John read the letter carefully over again, put it into his pocket-book, and went upstairs to wish Helen good-bye before going off to his work. He took Theo's little note to him, and read it to Helen as she lay smiling among her pillows, not thinking of much but her baby. In spite of her weakness, however, she put her husband into a dilemma by saying rather wistfully:

"I wonder Theo didn't write to me."

John looked at her doubtfully for a moment. He was perfectly truthful and open by nature, and if Helen had been herself, she would certainly have seen that he was deceiving her.

"Perhaps she thought you were not strong enough," he suggested, feeling like a liar.

"She is a silly old thing; she knows nothing about it," said Helen. "John, nurse says he is beginning to take notice." The change of subject was very comforting, and John presently went off to his work with Theo's secret still hidden away in his pocket-book.

He did not read his other letters till he got to the office. Among them there was a very friendly one from Hugh North,

whom, at Helen's wish, he had asked to be godfather to his son. On reading this it struck John that Hugh North was an uncommonly sensible man; that he was more interested in Theo and her affairs than any other member of her family; and that he, of course, would be the right person to consult in this difficulty. If anything could be done to stop such a foolish affair, Captain North would be the person to do it. Theo had probably written to him, for she was not at all ashamed of her wild proceedings, but John thought there could be no harm in having a little communication with Hugh on his own account. At least, it would be pleasant not to feel alone in the business. So he sat down and wrote a short letter to Hugh, telling him the news, in case he did not know it already, expressing his own regret and vexation, and enclosing a copy of Lady Redcliff's letter. When this was done, he put the whole thing out of his mind as much as possible, and attended to his own business.

His head clerk was full of a report that the Deerpur Collieries were likely to be for sale, and Mr. Goodall spent most of the day looking over the books with him, in order to decide whether it would be a prudent step to buy them. John was strongly inclined towards it; he deeply regretted having missed a former opportunity, which would have saved him from many annoyances, and the present entanglement among them.

He asked his clerk casually whether Mr. Fane was at Deerpur. The man said he thought not, but Mr. Litton had been there for a day or two, and there was some rumour of a dissolution of partnership between him and Mr. Warren.

John did not write that day to Theo, or to Lady Redcliff; he thought it best to wait till he had heard from Hugh North; but he was not quite prepared for the effect of his letter on that calm personage. Soon after he reached his office on Friday morning he received a telegram:

"I must speak to you. Will come down by the four train to-day. If you cannot receive me, telegraph, and come here."

John considered. Mrs. Fraser was going back to Linwood that afternoon. He did not wish to ask her to stay another day, which he must do, he thought, if he went off himself to London, for Helen could not be left alone. He was determined not to tell her the news till he had talked it over with Captain

North, and he did not quite see why he should inconvenience himself by rushing off to town on the affairs of his wife's cousin, much as he liked her. Of course, he did not care for the notion of a visitor while Helen was ill; but, after all, Hugh North was a very quiet fellow; and, on the whole, he thought he had better come.

He telegraphed that he should be met that evening at Mainley, and at luncheon-time he went to Helen's room, and told her quietly that Hugh was coming for a night or two.

"How funny!" said Helen. "Why doesn't he wait till I am downstairs again?"

"Did you ask him?" said Mrs. Fraser, who was sitting by the fire.

"No, I did not," said John a little shortly.

He thought it was no business of hers.

Mrs. Fraser did not at all mind his attempts at snubbing. She had her revenge by calling him "That excellent creature!" "Such a good, solid fellow!" and other opprobrious names of the same kind.

"Poor Hugh!" she said good-humouredly. "I always think his life is rather dismal, though he has plenty of friends. I dare say he wants a little change, and of course he ought to see his godson. At the same time—with no disrespect to you, dear John, and of course Nell is out of the question just now—I could understand it better if Theo were staying with you."

"Oh, mamma, that was always an idea of yours! But she doesn't care the least bit for him," said Helen, while John stared at Mrs. Fraser in horror and astonishment.

"No," she said, looking at the screen in her hand; "Theo is not likely to do anything so sensible. But it was your Uncle Henry's great wish, you know; and we all know that Hugh, who is most particular about girls in general, never had a word of blame for any of Theo's pranks. And now that he is alone, and with plenty of money, too, and Theo with nobody but that horrid Lady Redcliff—well, I think it would be the best thing that could happen, and I only wonder it has not happened before now."

"Did you know anything of this, Helen?" said John almost sternly.

"How absurd you are, John!" said Mrs. Fraser, looking round. "There is no secret. I have been saying nothing but what the whole family has always known."

"Oh, it's nothing!" murmured Helen.

"You mean to say, Mrs. Fraser," said

John, "that you believe Hugh North to be attached to Theo."

"I mean to say that I don't mean to be cross-examined," said Mrs. Fraser, smiling. "Yes, I think it is a sort of attachment. I shall be rather surprised if they don't marry in the end. But I wouldn't say anything about it, if I were you."

"No danger of that," said John, and he went out of the room.

The complications were thickening round him. He had no relations of his own to trouble him, but his wife's relations seemed bent on making his life uncomfortable.

Captain North arrived at Woodcote House about half-past six. He was always grave, and there was nothing unusual in his manner as he shook hands with his host, who met him in the hall.

"Very glad to see you," said John.

Mrs. Fraser's hints made him cautious about saying any more.

"Thanks," said Hugh. "I thought it best to come."

There was a curious, momentary flash in his blue eyes as he spoke, but he went on to enquire quite properly for Helen and the baby.

It was not till after dinner that they began to talk about the subject that had brought him there. The evening was warm and lovely, and they were sitting near an open window, looking out into the soft, moonshiny twilight. The lamp-rays fell on some flowers growing outside, making them shine like gems; there were voices and laughter in the village not far away; upstairs Helen and her new darling had fallen gently asleep. All the cares of life were kept away from her, but they weighed very heavily on her cousin Hugh, and on her husband, from something more than sympathy. John heartily wished that Mrs. Fraser had held her tongue. In that case he would have better known what to say to this man, who had talked in a dreary, absent way all through dinner, and was now leaning forward in a dejected attitude, silent, and staring into the garden.

At last John could not bear it any longer, and he began to speak in a kind, hearty voice, his eyes fixed on Hugh.

"I suppose you think this is rather bad news—don't you?" he said. "But if Theo has made up her mind, what are we to do? Lady Redcliff seems to expect a good deal; I'm afraid she will be disappointed."

Hugh winced a little, and did not answer for a moment. John had, no doubt, some slight guess at the truth, but he could not

tell that speaking of Theo, or hearing her name mentioned, was the sharpest pain this soldier had ever gone through. Hugh turned white to the lips, and coughed, and at last broke out into words. It was easier after that first effort.

"Lady Redcliff is quite right," he said very sternly. "The thing must be stopped."

"Ah, but how?"

"You have a bad opinion of Litton," said Hugh.

"I don't think much of him; but, after all, that is nothing against Fane."

"I am going to tell you something about Litton," Hugh went on, "and after that you will judge what is best to be done."

John nodded. He listened with the most careful attention to Hugh's story, which was told very shortly and simply.

"I do not wish to rake the matter up now," said Hugh at the end; "not publicly, I mean. My father forgave the man, and, though I can't do that, I will let him alone. But you will judge now, Goodall. My cousin—she can't—she can't marry that man's brother."

"Of course, if she knew, she would never have thought of it," said John gravely.

Hugh said nothing; he could not tell John Goodall that Theo did know.

"You think she ought to be told?" said John presently. "But are you sure it would make any difference to her now? She seemed to me rather a positive character."

"Most likely not. I don't want to discuss that," said Hugh. "Don't you see what I mean? It can't be—it must not be allowed to happen."

"I don't like the notion of it at all," said John. "I agree with you, but the question is, how is it to be prevented?"

"Why, surely," said Captain North, "a girl's relations have some influence, some authority. You see what her grandmother says—she is perfectly right. Even if it was not for this other reason, she might as well marry a beggar. It is an impossible marriage for her, and nothing but misery can come of it. Even if she is bent on ruining herself, we must not allow it. You must help me—we must do something."

All this was so unlike the calm, unimpassioned Hugh; there was such intense pain in his voice, his very attitude was so strained and miserable; that John Goodall was quite touched.

"What a confounded pity——" he began, and broke off suddenly, going on in a more reasonable manner. "Well, you see, North,

from what I know of your cousin, I suspect she has taken a fancy to this fellow, and she probably won't choose to hold him responsible for his brother's sins. She has something of her own—what is it, three hundred a year? And I suppose she will have something from her grandmother, but not if she marries to displease her. I don't suppose Gerald Fane has more than a poor curate would have, and I hear rumours of this Deerhurst colliery business breaking up; in that case he will be thrown out of employment. Then there is this affair of Litton's, which makes it quite necessary to prevent the thing, as you say. We can't have our family mixed up with swindlers. I think we had better have a talk with Fane himself."

Hugh North had listened patiently to this long prose, which told him nothing that he did not know before. At the final suggestion, however, he lifted up his head and laughed.

"What can be the use of talking to a selfish fool like that?" he said. "I should like to pick a quarrel with him, and shoot him. That is the only way of getting rid of him, as far as I can see."

"I won't stand by you, there," said John.

Hugh laughed again, and then passed his hand over his eyes and sighed. His calmness seemed to be breaking down, and now John quite believed what Mrs. Fraser had said. He was very grave; he was sorry for everybody, and felt himself, perhaps, benevolently superior to everybody concerned.

"I don't think Fane is a selfish fool," he said. "I believe he would have been a nice fellow, if circumstances had let him. I will find out to-morrow morning whether he is at Deerhurst, and you and I will talk to him. Or I will talk to him, if you are likely to lose your temper."

"Why should I lose my temper?" said Hugh stiffly. "I should be ready to talk to him, if I saw any use in it. But the only thing we can do is to threaten his brother with exposure."

"That will be a last resource," said John. "I should not be surprised if he were ignorant of that matter himself."

"Hardly possible," said Hugh.

They went on talking till very late, assuring each other that the thing must and should be stopped; but Hugh, at least, felt quite as despairing as when he had received Goodall's letter that morning, and in the first wild impatience had telegraphed to him. He would have moved heaven

and earth to do away with what had happened; but heaven and earth were immovable by him. The idea of Theo actually engaged to Gerald Fane, was maddening. He was sorry now that he had come down to Woodcote, for it needed a great effort to hide his feelings, and to make worthy John believe that he was only thinking of Theo's interests. They all regarded him almost as Theo's brother; and her brother had a right to be furious at her throwing herself away; but her brother would have taken the matter into his own hands, would have gone off to Locarno, without consulting anybody; and Hugh did not dare to think of seeing her. He rather wondered, as he lay awake that night, that John had not advised him to remonstrate with her. Could he have betrayed himself? No; the idea was absurd; a fellow like John Goodall could not possibly find out what had been told to nobody.

He came down the next morning very grave and dismal. John met him with the news that young Fane was at Deerhurst, and they agreed to walk over there together soon after breakfast. Helen sent down a message that she would like to see Hugh in the afternoon, and to show him the baby. He trembled at the thought of what she might say about Theo, and asked John what she thought of the affair.

"She knows nothing about it," said John reassuringly.

They walked towards Deerhurst by way of the colliery, through Woodcote village, along the high stony road, down that steep lane where Theo and Wool had walked between bright autumn hedges, now lovely with the cooler, calmer brightness of spring. There lay the colliery, seemingly deserted; there were the marshy meadows in their unhealthy green, the gleaming poisonous pools, the black stumps blacker than ever, with all the tender tints of air and earth round them. A forest of reeds was growing up by the water; the railway banks beyond were covered with gorse in flower.

"It does not look like a place to make money in," said John thoughtfully. "But I shall make a difference, if it ever belongs to me."

A little way beyond the colliery-gate there was a turn in the lane, screened by large thorn-bushes; the railway-arch was just beyond. At this corner they met Gerald Fane, walking very fast, and stooping, with his eyes on the ground.

There was something in his manner

which surprised both the men very much as he came up to them and stopped to speak to them without any sign of confusion. He did not look at all happy, or like an accepted lover; he evidently had not the slightest wish to avoid them; he looked indifferently at Hugh North, almost as if he did not know or care who he was.

"Have you heard that we are going to clear out of this?" he said to John Goodall.

"It's true, then?" said John.

"True, as far as I am concerned," said Gerald quietly. "I am going to Africa. I have just had a telegram. I have got to sail at the beginning of the week. A grand opening for building houses at Kimberley!"

"Why, you are not an architect or a builder," said John.

"I'm a director of a company, and that covers everything," answered Gerald.

"Is not this something very sudden?"

"I settled it with my brother last night. Yes, it's rather sudden, but things generally are; and one must get rid of one's life somehow."

The three young men stood together in the road. Hugh and John were both looking at Gerald—John with an interest which was not at all unkind; Hugh with a wondering anxiety which tried to be like indifference, and succeeded fairly well.

Gerald himself was looking away up the hill, and for a moment or two they were all silent.

Then, as John evidently did not know what to say or do next, and as young Fane was not likely to stand there long to be stared at, Captain North took the matter into his own hands.

"You know who I am, Mr. Fane?" he said.

Gerald bowed, and the look in his eyes was both fierce and ashamed.

"Then you will excuse my curiosity," said Hugh very coldly. "The last news that I heard about you was—not that you were going to Africa."

"I did not know that myself till last night," said Gerald in a low voice. "It can't matter to you where I go."

"If that other news is true, it matters extremely."

"It is not true."

"I must ask you to explain yourself," said Hugh, frowning angrily.

Gerald did not answer him directly, but turned to John Goodall, who was standing by, ready to interfere if the quarrel grew serious.

"You don't know," he said; "at least, I think not. But Captain North knows very well. Is it not enough that I tell you I had a talk with my brother last night?" he said to Hugh.

"I understand," said Hugh after a pause. "You did not know before?"

"I know now."

"Very well, and you see how utterly impossible—— But, even if there had been no such obstacle as this, I tell you the thing would have been equally impossible, and I should have told you so under any circumstances."

Gerald looked Captain North full in the face now. His eyes were full of anger and scornful defiance, but he said nothing, and after a moment his eyes fell before Hugh's cold stare.

"You have the advantage of me, Captain North," he said; "we won't argue. I feel the disgrace as much as you can wish, and you will not be troubled with me any more."

Then he walked off towards the colliery. The two others strolled on in the direction of the railway, at first without speaking, but presently John Goodall said:

"Poor fellow!"

"I don't see why you need pity him," said Hugh. "A fellow who climbs too high is sure to get a fall. The airs he gave himself were enough for me, long ago."

"He is popular generally," said John. "I wonder how Theo will take it?"

He was amused and a little angry at Hugh's contemptuous hardness. If he meant to punish him by this sudden allusion to Theo, he succeeded, for Hugh mooned along in a depth of dismalness, and hardly spoke again till they were back at Woodcote. Then he insisted on going back to town by the next train without waiting to see Helen, and John, to say the truth, did not press him much to stay.

Mr. Gerald Fane had evidently broken off his engagement; but it seemed that no one was pleased, not even Theo's most anxious and affectionate relations.

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